

back as they met; or, to our great glee, they might include one of us in this play, making us feel very much a part of things.

"The man in the straw stood hip deep in the loose stuff, forking it back away from the carrier. At times he would be almost buried.

"There was a chaff carrier, too. A man with a huge wooden fork with wide tines moved the chaff as it sifted between the slats of the straw carrier. He kept a red bandanna tied over his nose and mouth to keep out the smothering dust, but even then it must have been a very miserable job.

"To us children he had a special attraction because he was really in this big event right up to his ears. Before long his eyebrows and hair not covered by his hat would be thick with chaff. What a wonderful show he put on when the machine stopped and he used his floppy old felt hat to beat the chaff from his shoulders and back, and grinned at us from his mask-like face.

"The men were not the only ones who were busy at threshing time. Mother and the girls had to prepare the meals for the crew.

"There were six or eight regulars who followed the machine, and then each farmer had to get extras to carry grain, take care of the straw and, sometimes, pitch the bundles from the stack to the machine. This meant there might be from twelve to fifteen men to feed. And when it was threshing time, they all showed up for the meals, even breakfast. Of course the men who operated the machine stayed right with it night and day.

"Breakfast was served by sunrise at the latest. Dinner was at noon, and such food as we were expected to provide! A woman's reputation as a cook was often based on how she fed the threshers. It soon became common knowledge.

"There was not much stress placed on how it was served, but was there enough and was it good? There had to be meat -- roasts, steak, or chicken -- lots of mashed potatoes, stacks of homemade bread or biscuits, several vegetables, pickles, jam and jelly. Pie, cake, or rice pudding was served for dessert.

"The women and children waited until the men were fed, but that was expected, and it was a real entertainment to see how much food could be consumed in so short a time. There was always enough food left over, although we had to wash part of the dishes before there were enough dishes to go round the second time.

"When the threshing was done, the straw stack looked like a yellow mountain to us children, and did we explore it! We would roll down the smooth trail left by the straw carrier until we looked as if we were made of straw, and our clothes were so full of chaff we could hardly endure the scratching. That was the price we had to pay for our fun, but it was worth it all.

"Then we played horse and tramped round and round the deep tracks